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ABSTRACT

This study examined the variables that affect vocational teachers' implementation of an educational innovation--peer tutors for mainstreamed special education students. The researchers explored teachers' perceptions of the peer tutoring program prior to the inservice session, at the completion of a pilot test, and prior to the second year of implementation. The subjects for the study were 16 vocational and academic teachers employed at the Arnold R. Burton Vocational Technical Center in Virginia. They provided data through written surveys and interviews. During the inservice session, teachers were provided with strategies for using peer tutors, and the teachers made suggestions for training and selecting the tutors. Training was provided for 36 peer tutors, who then worked in the pilot program for one semester with the teachers. About half of the tutors continued in the following semester. The data gathered before the inservice program showed that more than half the teachers had used peer tutors informally and most were favorably disposed toward them. Data gathered at the conclusion of the pilot study and at the end of the next semester showed that teachers felt there were benefits from the peer tutoring program. They especially liked the training provided to the peer tutors (called "teacher assistants"). The teachers also cited support from a school-based coordinator and participation by an outside consultant as contributing to the success of the program. Program improvements wanted by the teachers included more stress on responsibility and commitment for the teacher assistants. Based on the results of the study, the program is continuing and being expanded with the inclusion of new teachers. (KC)

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Follow-up of Inservice Program on Teacher
Assistants for Mainstreamed Students
in a Vocational Technical Center

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The focus of inservice education in vocational special needs has emphasized the development of positive attitudes toward and general understanding of persons with specific handicaps. More recently, the emphasis has shifted to providing teachers with instructional strategies for integrating handicapped students in the regular classroom. In a study by Sitlington & Wimmer (1981) vocational teachers ranked the acquisition of instructional techniques for working with special needs students as their highest inservice priority.

The majority of research studies on vocational special needs inservice programs concentrate on the effects on participants' attitudes and knowledge. The length of the inservices range from two hours to six weeks. Most data appears to be gathered at the beginning and end of these programs. Few studies include follow up evaluation beyond the inservice program. Not surprisingly, research indicates most teachers require assistance after attending inservice programs to fully implement new skills or techniques (Harasymiv & Horne, 1976; Larivee & Cook, 1979). If we continue to provide inservice education in vocational special needs it is essential that we examine the long term effects of these programs.

In a review of literature, Berman & McLaughlin (1978) identified follow up as important to overall effectiveness of inservices. Furthermore, concrete hands on learning, local coordinator for assistance, peer advice and administrative support should also be considered to insure an innovation presented in an inservice is integrated into practice (Joyce & Showers, 1980; Hutson, 1981). Unfortunately, few research studies in vocational special needs address these factors.

The purpose of this study is to examine the variables that affect vocational teachers' implementation of an educational innovation, peer tutors for mainstreamed special education students. The researcher explores teachers'

perceptions of the peer tutoring program prior to the inservice, at the completion of a pilot test and prior to the second year of implementation.

Methodology

Population

The subjects for this study were vocational and academic teachers employed at Arnold R. Burton Vocational Technical Center in Roanoke, Virginia. After attending an inservice session on the use of peer tutors, 16 of 20 teachers volunteered to participate in the program. Adoption of this innovation required extra time and effort by these teachers, therefore, random selection of participants was inappropriate.

Three academic support and thirteen vocationally certified teachers participated in the pilot tutoring program. Seven had Master's degrees, three Bachelors degrees and six were provisionally certified. Teaching experience ranged from 2 to 26 years and the mean teaching experience was 12.4 years.

Instruments

Teachers provided data at the beginning of the inservice program, the end of the pilot test and the beginning of the second year of the tutoring program. Data was collected using written survey and interview format.

The preinservice survey, developed by the researcher, attempted to ascertain teachers' perceptions of peer tutoring program benefits. The survey requested information on roles and expectations of peer tutors. Participating teachers completed this 4 item survey during the inservice session.

The second instrument was a follow up interview at the end of the semester-long pilot test. Teachers were asked 6 open ended questions regarding frequency of use, benefits and working relationships with tutors. Another question addressed tutor training. The final question asked teachers for factors

that affected success or failure of the program.

The final instrument was another follow up interview. This interview was composed of demographic and 7 ratings questions. This interview was designed to determine variables that affected use of peer tutors. These variables include: a) release time, b) administrator support, c) outside consultant, d) inservice, e) student training, f) coordinator support, and g) peer support.

Procedure

Twenty vocational and academic teachers volunteered to participate in the inservice program. These teachers were given released time at the end of the school day to attend a two hour inservice session. The preservice survey was administered at the beginning of the session.

The inservice session presented the rationale, benefits and roles for peer tutors as an instructional strategy. Teachers were active participants as they designed the program to meet their needs. Goals were selected and peer tutors were renamed "teacher assistants." Discussion of teacher assistant roles and selection criteria prepared teachers to observe students and make assistant selection.

Sixteen of the 20 inservice teachers identified potential teacher assistants. These students were required to participate in a training program. The teacher assistant training was similar to the teacher inservice. The major exception was "teacher assistants" spent more time practicing specific tutoring skills through role-play, simulations and discussion.

A pilot test of the teacher assistant program was conducted September 1983 to January 1984. Sixteen teachers and thirty-six teacher assistants initiated the semester long project. Data was collected from teachers, teacher assistants and students receiving help in January. These data were collected through

interviews conducted by the coordinator.

During the second semester January-June 1984, 16 teachers and 16 teacher assistants continued the program. No data was collected at the end of the school year. However, it was decided that degree of interest during the 1984-85 school year would be an indication of level of adoption of the innovation. The follow up interview of 16 teachers who initiated the project was conducted in September 1984.

RESULTS

Preinservice Survey

Twenty teachers attending the inservice session responded to this survey. Most of the teachers (55%) reported using students as tutors with special needs students on an informal basis. The majority of teacher rated the following as major advantages of using peer tutors: a) opportunity for tutors to develop responsibility, b) opportunities for success of students receiving help, and c) time for the teachers to individualize. When asked what tasks did they expect tutors to perform, the highest ratings were given to working with individuals and in small groups, and reviewing lessons.

Pilot Test Interview

The pilot test interview was given to 16 teachers who completed the first semester program. The school based coordinator conducted the interviews. Fourteen teachers reported that they developed positive working relationships with their assistants and that they were an asset to instruction. Two teachers dropped from the program during the first semester. They indicated that their assistants were immature, had poor attendance and would not take responsibility.

Another question dealt with teacher assistant training. Six teachers felt the training was adequate. The remaining made suggestions for improvement. These

include such items as confidence building, questioning techniques and developing commitment to responsibility. One teacher responded, "It has been great that these students have the opportunity to receive training. This adds prestige and authority that they demand." Finally, teachers reported factors that made the program a success. Several teachers indicated teacher assistants' attendance, attitude, and positive peer relationships affected their overall success.

Follow up Interview

The follow up interview was conducted in September 1984. Complete data was gathered from 15 of 16 teachers concerning use of teacher assistants.

Seventeen teachers are using teacher assistants during the first semester of the 1984-85 school term. Nine teachers are continuing from last year, four are new teachers to the school and four are new additions from last year's inservice program. Another teacher indicated interest in participating during second semester of the 1984-85 year.

Teachers responded to a series of seven variables and rated their impact on use to teacher assistants. Support from a school based coordinator ranked the highest (2.5), followed by training of teacher assistants (2.4). The outside consultant received the third highest rank (2.3). Principal support was ranked fifth (2.0), inservice ranked sixth (1.9) and peer support was seventh (1.4).

DISCUSSION

The results of this study clearly indicate that teachers will implement a new idea or program if they are committed to that concept and feel they have support. It was not surprising that teachers ranked the school based resource person for encouragement and support as one of the highest ranking variables. The outside consultant was also ranked favorably. This supports research by Harasymiv (1976), Larivee & Cook (1979) and Berman & McLaughlin (1978),

indicating teachers need assistance after inservice to integrate new skills.

Implementing a program of trained teacher assistants was new to this faculty although 55% reported they had used students to tutor on an informal basis. Throughout the inservice program the importance of selected, trained peer tutors was emphasized. Teacher supported this by rating trained teacher assistants as having a significant impact on the program's success. Suggestions from all teachers including those who did not continue the program involved strengthening selection criteria, stressing attendance and developing responsibility through training.

Teachers ranked their inservice session as having some impact on their use of peer tutors. Although, their response was not significant, it does suggest that inservice was helpful. Vocational teachers need more inservices that provide them with instructional strategies. The principals' support had some impact on implementation. This support was not as visible to the teachers as was in school coordinator. Teachers are generally unaware of the role of the administrator in supporting the coordinator, assisting in scheduling and training and public relations.

The program has maintained continuity since its inception. The teachers were actively involved in designing the program and selecting and monitoring their teacher assistants. Therefore, the innovation is their own. Opportunities to provide feedback resulted in several improvements for the second year of the program. The number of teachers participating in the program has remained at around 16 or 17. Last year 20 teacher assistants and the second year 23 assistants also supported this continuity.

An inservice program that provides vocational teachers with an instructional strategy that they can individualize to fit their needs has been successful. The

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continued support and follow up from the in school coordinator, participation by an outside consultant and well prepared teacher assistants made this program a success!

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